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Proof for the Resurrection

Due to new research from modern medicine, the historical reliability of the Bible, and the external sources that reference the event, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ should be considered a historical event. Although arguably the most famous event in human history, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is also one of the most controversial. But in all actuality, there is ample evidence that supports the claim of the resurrection. This paper will explain why the logical explanation to this evidence is that Jesus Christ rose from the dead a little under 2000 years ago.

There are two key criteria in evaluating the historical reliability of an ancient text. The first is that the original manuscript, that is, the one the author personally wrote, contained truthful information. The second is that the document hasn't changed since its original manuscript. How do the gospel accounts stack up against these tests? Pretty well.

First, what evidence do we have that the apostles told the truth? One reason to believe them is that they were writing their accounts to record history. This can be seen in Luke's gospel where he says: "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully

investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.” (New International Version, Luke. 1.1-4) As this passage states, Luke was writing this piece to record history. He also got his information by researching thoroughly and by interviewing eyewitnesses. All New Testament (NT) accounts were written by either first-hand eyewitness accounts (in the case of Matthew and John) or through testimonies of first-hand accounts (in the case of Mark and Luke). All the accounts were written between 20-30 years after the resurrection, as well as an early Christian creed quoted in 1st Corinthians that has been dated to no more than 3 years after the resurrection (Lüdemann 1994, 38). When compared to Alexander the Great, whose first accounts were written 400 years after his death, it is reasonable to believe that these accounts were incredibly soon after the resurrection.

The next reason to believe them is the fact of martyrdom. A martyr is defined as someone who is killed for their beliefs. From being beheaded, to being stoned to death, all the authors of the synoptic gospels and the apostle Paul (who wrote the non-gospel accounts of the life of Jesus) were all martyred for their faith. There is no record that any of them recanted their beliefs. This doesn't make any sense, what would the apostles have to gain if they were trying to promote a lie through their writings? Nothing, considering people very rarely lie if they have nothing to gain, especially if they have something to lose.

Second, what evidence do we have for the historic stability of the text. The first thing we need to look at is how quickly we have copies of New Testament works. The first comes in the form of a fragment of the book of John from just 50 years after the original autograph was written. This isn't very helpful though, as it's only a small, 7 verse fragment of one book. But by

the time we hit 150 years after the originals we have enough fragments to compose most of the New Testament, and by 250 years we have complete works of the New Testament.

Next, the textual variations. The NT alone has over 500,000 variations, which is impressive considering that the NT only has 140,000 words. But, when you realize that these variations are coming from more than 26,000 manuscripts, the number of mistakes makes more sense, as all these copies were handwritten. Another thing to note, is what counts as a variation. Word order, for instance: if one scribe wrote “Christ Jesus” and another wrote “Jesus Christ” that counts as a variation. Once researchers account for simple spelling and grammatical errors, it can be found that less than 1% of textual variation hold any meaningful variation. This is still a large number, but research professors Andreas J. Köstenberger and Michael Kruger argue it doesn’t matter. They conclude that: “All the teaching of the New Testament—whether regarding the person of Jesus (divinity and humanity), the work of Jesus (his life, death, and resurrection), the application of his work to the believer (justification, sanctification, glorification) or other doctrines—are left unaffected by the remaining unresolved textual variations.”(Köstenberger and Kruger, 228) They come to this conclusion on meaningful textual variation because “Not only are they very rare, but most of the time they affect the meaning of the text very little (and thus are relatively boring).”(Köstenberger and Kruger, 226) As you can see, while there is much variation in biblical manuscripts, the accounts themselves have not been affected.

Although the accounts of the NT are historically reliable, if Jesus was a historical figure, there should be non-biblical accounts of his life. Which there are. The first comes from 94 AD, when Jewish/Roman historian Josephus wrote of Jesus in his work *The Antiquities of the Jews*.

While Josephus works reference Jesus twice, once in a short passage and again in a longer passage, the long passage is widely thought to have been doctored, so we will just focus on the shorter passage. "... he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned"(Josephus, Book 20 Chapter 9). In this passage, Josephus writes of Jesus's brother James, who was stoned. But in introducing James, he also references Jesus.

The second account comes from a Roman historian named Cornelius Tacitus, who in 115 AD wrote in his book *The Annals*: "Nero substituted as culprits, and punished in the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians. Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilatus, and the pernicious superstition was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judea, the home of the disease, but in the capital itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue."(Tacitus, 283) In this account, Tacitus is discussing how Nero blamed the Christians for the great fire of Rome. He also explains that Christians were named after a man name Christus (Christ) who died by sentence of Pontius Pilatus, and that afterwards the "Pernicious Superstition" (Christianity) was slowed for a moment only to rapidly expand once more.

The third account comes from a Syrian philosopher named Mara bar Serapion, who wrote a letter to his son in what most scholars believe to be soon after 73AD in the first century: "What else can we say, when the wise are forcibly dragged off by tyrants, their wisdom

is captured by insults, and their minds are oppressed and without defense? ...What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise king? It was just after that their kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three wise men: the Athenians died of hunger; the Samians were overwhelmed by the sea and the Jews, desolate and driven from their own kingdom, live in complete dispersion. But Socrates is not dead, because of Plato; neither is Pythagoras, because of the statue of Juno; nor is the wise king, because of the "new law" he laid down."(Eerdmans, 53-55) In this excerpt, Seripion talks about how even when wise men are oppressed, their wisdom still prevails in the end. While discussing this topic, he references a "wise king" who was executed by the Jews. Many scholars believe that Seripion is talking about Jesus, as he was called King of the Jews by Pontius Pilate during the crucifixion. The author also points out the fact that the teachings of Jesus continued to survive even after the Romans killed him. This is considered by many scholars to be the oldest non-biblical account of Jesus's life.

Once the sources are in place, a timeline of events should be constructed. From the non-biblical accounts, it is found that a man named Christ (who was the brother of James) was sentenced to death by Pontius Pilate for claiming he was the son of God (Pilate did not believe that he deserved the death sentence) and was crucified on Passover eve. A large explosion of the Christian faith is then reported, though the event that caused it is not referenced in these accounts. Once the biblical accounts are added, it is described that after Jesus was announced dead, he was put in a follower's tomb, and a large stone was rolled in front. Three days after, a group of women went to put spices on the body. When they reached the tomb, they found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. Over the course of the next 40 days, many people believed to have seen Jesus in the flesh. They saw him, touched his hands, talked with him, and

at one point 500 people saw him at once. From the biblical accounts, the conclusion can be drawn that the resurrection of Jesus was a leading cause in the rapid growth of Christianity in the early first century.

Once a timeline is drawn up, a lot of skeptics argue that the resurrection isn't the most logical explanation. But, given the 3 minimal facts (the empty tomb, Jesus's postmortem appearances, and the disciples belief in the resurrection), these claims don't make sense. The 3 counterclaims to be discussed in this paper are the swoon theory, the stolen body theory, and the hallucination theory.

The swoon theory states that Jesus didn't die on the cross, and that he was just badly injured. The Journal of American Medical Association begs to differ. In their article "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ" they write: "Clearly, the weight of historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to his side was inflicted and supports the traditional view that the spear, thrust between his right ribs, probably perforated not only the right lung but also the pericardium and heart and thereby ensured his death. Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge." (Edwards et al.). This is incredibly strong evidence for Jesus's death on the cross.

The stolen body theory states that after Jesus was put in the tomb, his disciples came and took his body, thus explaining the empty tomb. The problem with this claim is the fact of martyrdom. All the disciples were either strongly persecuted or killed for their faith. Why would they all go to the grave, claiming they saw something they didn't.

The hallucination theory states that all the people who claimed to see Jesus after death were hallucinating. The discrepancies with this claim are twofold: the lack of expectation (which is commonly regarded as a prerequisite for hallucination), and the number and nature of the accounts. While a few of the disciples may have believed Jesus could have come back, not all of them did. Thomas doubted Jesus was back, even while he was looking right at him (John 20:24-29). The women who found the empty tomb wouldn't have wasted money on expensive perfumes if they expected him to rise from the dead. And maybe the most compelling witness of them all; James the brother of Jesus, who had previously not believed that Jesus was the Messiah (John 7:5), claimed to see him after his death (1st Corinthians 15:7). As for the number and nature of the hallucinations, clinical psychologist Gary A. Sibcy writes "I have surveyed the professional literature (peer-reviewed journal articles and books) written by psychologists, psychiatrists, and other relevant healthcare professionals during the past two decades and have yet to find a single documented case of a group hallucination, that is, an event for which more than one person purportedly shared in a visual or other sensory perception where there was clearly no external referent." (Licona, 484) Since the NT claims that 500 people saw him at once (1 Corinthians 15:6), the hallucination theory does not seem plausible.

Through all the evidence, a striking case for the bodily resurrection of Jesus can be made. First, the truthful and historically stable New Testament lays a framework for the timeline of events that transpired. Second, the non-biblical sources for Jesus corroborate the fact that he existed and died on the cross. Lastly, logic and medical research show why none of the prominent theories against the resurrection are plausible. Thus, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ should be considered a historic event.

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